

It's work, but not as we know it

Chill-out zones, napping cubicles and two-day weeks might sound like science fiction, but experts are predicting dramatic changes in the office by 2017. Liz Hollis reports

The harsh lighting and banks of cubicles have gone – replaced by a home-from-home vibe with giant communal desks, showers, chill-out zones and even a specially-designed pod where you can power nap after your 2am virtual meeting across time zones.

It's a comfortable office now, designed to entice the army of e-lancers to actually come in to headquarters, but you only work there two days a week. Time sheets have long gone and these days you decide when you want to go in. With the new permanent connection to a voice-activated "super-web", you are free to work where and when you feel like it, as long as you meet the deadlines.

This is how the office of 2017 might look. It's work, but not as we know it, because the workplace will have changed beyond recognition.

"Expect a quantum shift in the world of work," says Anne Lise Kjaer, chief executive of Kjaer Global and a futurist who predicts upcoming trends. "Within a few years, the very phrase 'going to work' will be meaningless. Work will be what we do, not a place we go to."

She says a raft of social trends will drive the changes, including increasing spiritual and emotional awareness, smart technology, globalisation, the rise of Asia and the new economies, and female empowerment.

Futurist Ray Hammond agrees that we will see mindblowing advances in technology at work. "We will be permanently connected to a ubiquitous super-web that will utterly blur the lines between corporate life and personal life. Homo sapiens is about to become homo virtualis."

He says that Google will grow exponentially into the equivalent of a functioning world brain. "If you think Google is pretty good now, just wait and see how it develops over the next decade. It will become like having a super-intelligent companion with you at all times that replies to your voice-activated questions in a natural tone.



Google, known for its innovative office environments, also looks set to shape our working lives in other ways during the next decade Chris Gascoigne/VIEW

You'll have it wherever you are: at the pool, on a bus, sunning yourself on a Caribbean beach." Unfortunately, it will be almost impossible to switch off and escape from your job.

Technology will see companies outsourcing more tasks, and every worker in the UK will be on first-name

terms with a colleague in India or China. A company's core workforce will be much smaller and there will be more independent virtual working, or "e-lancing".

Alongside the technological advances, futurists predict a radical shift towards a more spiritual and emotional era. Kjaer says we are entering the "emotional decade", and ethics and spirituality will prevail in the workplace. "People have discovered that money alone doesn't buy happiness and they will be looking elsewhere for meaning. A good salary package won't be enough to keep staff. Companies will have to empower workers and enhance their physical and mental wellbeing, too. We will want work to be life-enhancing and the companies we work for to be ethical. We will be looking for emotional connection and empowerment on all levels," she says.

She also predicts the rise of a powerful new breed of worker, called the yepie (young experimenting perfection-seeker). Unlike yuppies, their goal in life is to accumulate experiences rather than worldly goods. Yuppies will expect to work for a company that offers life-enhancing perks such as charity

'Every worker in the UK will be on first-name terms with a colleague in India or China'

work sabbaticals in Africa, a Polar expedition to test body and soul, life-coaching, pampering treatments and nutritious snacks and meals.

By 2017, the physical environment at work will have changed drastically, too. Offices will encourage more collaboration by banishing the isolating cubicles and bringing in more communal areas and break-out zones. "People will never stop going to the office completely, because they like human contact. But most people will only need to go two or three days a week," says Hammond. "Those days will be spent ideas-sharing and collaborating."

Companies will have to work hard to entice workers in, and this will see

workplaces that look more like homes, with kitchens, showers, living areas, chill-out zones and even nap stations.

Andi Gibbs, director of Art Architecture, which specialises in innovative office design, suggests we are entering a new era of "lifestyle at work". He predicts the rise of the no-cubicle culture, with offices of the future encouraging far more collaboration between workers than exists today.

"The best design will ensure nobody is hidden away in isolation. Instead, the workplace will operate more like a hub, removing office boundaries – merging the public with the private and bringing in inspiring communal areas, such as a staff meeting area that doubles as a public art gallery and cafe."

The future is also bright for female and older workers. Drastic skills shortages will see companies desperate to retain mothers and 50-plus employees in the workplace. Jobs will be sculpted to fit lives as workers organise their own work patterns and jobs become more autonomous.

"I am optimistic about the workplace in 2017," says Kjaer. "I think it will be a better place to be."

Future perfect?

Pervasive connectivity You will be permanently connected to a ubiquitous, voice-activated "super-web".

Spiritual awareness New emphasis in the workplace on holistic wellbeing, environment and ethics, as well as empowerment and fulfilment.

No-cubicle culture The banks of desks and cubicles will be replaced by enhanced communal areas.

The rise of the "yepie" A new breed of employee who is motivated by collecting experiences, not material goods.

Life-enhancing work incentives A new era of improving perks such as free pampering treatments, workplace life coaches and charity work sabbaticals.

Sculpting jobs to fit lives Workers will throw out the timesheets and organise their own work patterns.

Empowerment of women and older workers Skills shortages will mean companies will need to retain mothers and those over 50.

Offshoring and globalisation Work will be divided into smaller tasks and distributed around the globe.

Badge of honour

Nick Pandya speaks to three HR professionals who have upgraded their CIPD membership



DEBORAH STRATHEARN Metropolitan Police Service; Graduate member to Chartered MCIPD Following her A-levels, Deborah Strathearn joined

the Benefits Agency (now the Department for Work and Pensions, or DWP), working in a variety of roles for more than 12 years. It was there that she got

a taste for HR, and decided to study for the CIPD Certificate in Personnel Practice, then a postgraduate diploma in human resource management, and finally Graduate membership of the CIPD, in 2002. Keen to make the most of her hard-earned credentials, she joined the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) as HR manager in 2004, based at Holborn Police Station, where she is responsible for 1,000 employees within Camden borough's operational command unit.

"I love the unpredictability and variety of work, though it comes with challenges, long working hours and stress at times," she says.

During the terrorist attacks on London in July 2005, Strathearn says she was struck by officers' instinctive compassion to help protect members of the public, despite the terrible scenes and dangers that they faced.

"It made me realise just how important it is to employ the right people for the right jobs. It's the crux of successful recruitment in any organisation. I feel very privileged to have played an important role in the work of

the MPS that day," she says.

Strathearn has since upgraded her CIPD membership to Chartered MCIPD – something she achieved while on maternity leave and coping with the unfamiliar territory of being a first-time parent. "I can empathise now with the struggle working parents face trying to achieve a work-life balance," she says.



MICHAEL HOLBROOK PricewaterhouseCoopers; Chartered MCIPD to Chartered FCIPD After studying computing and information

systems at Manchester University, Michael Holbrook began a career in local government, then joined the British Junior Chamber where he developed a strong interest in training and development. Studying for an MBA sparked his interest in HR and in particular the subject of bridging the IT skills gap. "I joined Wellcome,

now part of GlaxoSmithKline, as an HR executive," he says. "From day one, I knew that I wanted to move into mainstream HR, as it had become clear to me that implementing technology solutions without considering the people implications was futile." After a secondment to Wellcome's management development team, Holbrook became part of a team that re-engineered the HR function there.

Since then, he has worked as a graduate recruiter in the fast-moving consumer goods sector, headed up learning and development centre at Barclays, and joined the HR executive team at the DWP as director of learning and development. There, he was responsible for introducing a £30m learning modernisation programme, the largest HR transformation programme in Europe. He is now director of organisation and people development at PricewaterhouseCoopers, where he leads a team of 70. "I love the variety and scope of my role, which combines internal consultancy, strategic advice-giving, team management and

coaching," says Holbrook. He reckons too many HR professionals still believe that change needs to be done "to" people, with little or no consultation.



RUPEE JOHAL Northgate Business Solutions; Graduate member to Chartered MCIPD Rupee Johal's first brush with HR came during her degree

in social politics and management, when she realised HR wasn't just about making organisations a nice place to work, but supporting businesses to achieve commercial goals, too. Following a Master's degree, she worked for a recruitment consultant, gaining insights in the finance, IT, public and commercial sectors.

"My time at Northgate has allowed me to work with the business as a partner, not just someone providing an internal service," she says. "It's a great opportunity to help shape the business and the HR department."